



Jan 16

“THE OPEN JUDGMENT.”

A

SERMON

PREACHED IN

*CHRIST CHURCH, ALBANY STREET,
SAINT PANCRAS,*

BY THE

REV. J. W. FESTING, M.A., VICAR,

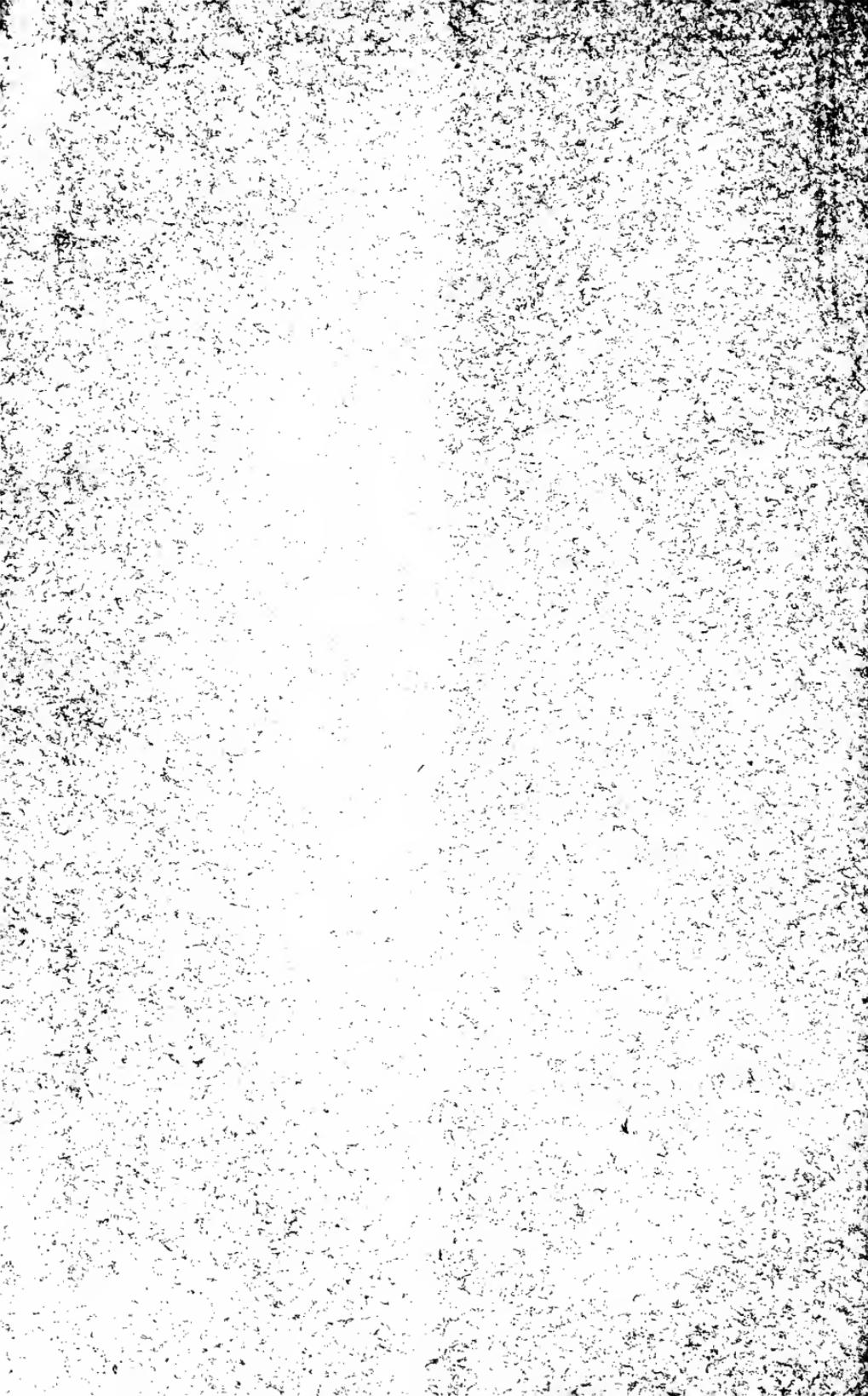
On the Morning of the Third Sunday in Advent,
14th DECEMBER, 1884.

Published by Request.

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This Sermon is printed in deference to the strongly expressed wish of some who heard it.

Those who know the published Sermons of the present Bishop of Ely, and a volume of Parochial Sermons by the late Professor Mozley, will see how largely I am indebted to them.

J. W. FESTING.

ST. LUKE xii, 2.—“There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed ; neither hid that shall not be known.”

THESE words, or some very like them, expressing the same idea, were used by our Lord on more than one occasion. In St. Matthew x. we read that when he was warning his disciples of the persecutions they would have to endure, how they would have to be as their Master in meeting with opposition and insult at the hands of men, he said “Fear them not : for there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and hid that shall not be known.” The secret fear that holds men back, the secret courage, courage that triumphs over fear, shall one day be made known.

On another occasion (St. Luke viii.), just after the Parable of the Sower, our Lord called the attention of His disciples to the purposes for which knowledge is given, and He did so by using the figure of Light, and pointing to men’s ways. “No man,” He says, “who lights a candle, immediately covers it over and hides it away ; he sets it out where its light can spread around. For nothing is secret that shall not be made manifest : neither anything hid that shall not be known and come abroad. Take heed, therefore, how ye hear.” If God gives you the Light of Truth, He means it to shew itself in you before the world, and not to be covered over and made useless by negligence and forgetfulness.

In the passage from which my text comes the words are connected with a different subject—“ Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed ; neither hid that shall not be known.”

We may set on one side by itself the second passage to which I have called your attention. Our Lord is speaking there of God’s way of teaching men. Truths are taught secretly ; they are wrapped up in parables ; they are like the

little seed sown in the darkness of the earth—they are communicated to men in the silences, the darknesses, the solitudes of life. But taught secretly, they are to be proclaimed openly. “What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye on the housetops.” Bring forth the Light of Truth, set it up where it can be seen and be of use. Let it illumine your heart and conscience, your whole life; let it illumine the lives of others. God’s purpose is, that that which is covered shall be revealed, and that which is hid shall be known. Recognize this purpose. Don’t let the hidden remain hidden. As you hear the Word, look for that secret which is to be made known to you and to transform you. Take heed how ye hear.

By following such a line of thought we are easily led to that which the other passages bring more distinctly and more directly before us; they point on to a great disclosing of secrets in the future. In the view of that disclosure, the disciples are to find the ground why, with regard to one set of circumstances they were not to fear, but they are also to find the ground why, with regard to another, they were to take heed and beware.

It is of a future—a future different in character from the present state of things in which we now find ourselves—that our Lord is speaking in the text. For these words give the reason why they are to beware of being like the Pharisees in their hypocrisy; but it is not the mere dread of exposure now in this life that is put forward; our Lord does not say this only. Do not pretend to be something you are not, for you will be found out. The hypocrisy of the Pharisees was something deeper, something more subtle than that coarse hypocrisy which consists of putting on a character just for a time. It was not an hypocrisy which sought to deceive the eye of the world; it was an unconscious hypocrisy to a great extent, the man professing to be religious and thinking himself religious; his fault lying not so much in the inconsistency between his life and his profession, as in the character of his profession, in the idea of religion which he had formed. It

was an hypocrisy which followed upon the not taking heed how the word of God was heard, how the secret things in it were to be manifested. So it was not of detection by other men that our Lord was speaking, but of some more thorough sifting of the character. And then in what follows, He leads the minds of His hearers on into the future ; He speaks of the time when He shall have to confess men or to deny them before His Father which is in Heaven. It is clear, then, that the words do refer to that great future which awaits us. The truth they express is that which finds place in to-day's epistle, where St. Paul speaks of the coming of the Lord, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of their hearts. The truth expressed is that great one, that in the day of judgment all things will be laid bare. All things, indeed, are now open to the eyes of God ; there is nothing which He needs to have revealed or made known to Him. But all things will then be revealed and made known before angels and men ; yes, revealed and made known to man himself. Now, in this life, many things are covered over and hid—many things, good as well as bad. God's judgments are in the world even now ; for God ruleth all things, but we cannot trace out His ruling. The causes of things, the real character of things, the consequences of things are all very much hidden. "I know nothing by myself," St. Paul says in to-day's epistle, "I cannot accuse myself of anything," (he is speaking of his discharge of the duties of his apostleship), "yet am I not hereby justified. There are parts of my life, parts of my very self, which are hidden from me, though known to God."

But that secrecy which is part of the present order of things will be done away with hereafter. The Bible puts strongly before us that the future judgment will be an open judgment ; in the first place it will be before all and address itself to the conscience of all ; and then, secondly, it will make all things manifest, even the very secrets of the heart. All this, as I have just said, is a great contrast to the state of things in which we live. It is not that there are no

judgments of God working now in the world, that there is no system of consequences which is a system of rewards and punishments, for there is all this, but for the most part it is now secret. Here is the great difference. Now, we do not see how our present circumstances ; the things that affect us now are springing out of things that have gone before. Look at the matter in this way : consider one or two points which are suggested by the thought of our dependence on others, the way in which our life is constantly affected by the action of others. Our life is so affected. People do not always tell us, and in fact they could not always tell us, why they treat us as they do. Yet things we have said or done, perhaps little things, have made them form an opinion about us, which guides them in their treatment of us. Think how common offences of the tongue are. "If any man offend not in tongue," says St. James, "the same is a perfect man." We may have said something hastily. We may have said something which was unkind, which was insolent, which was untrue. People who heard it did not point out the wrong to us. They did not declare what they thought of us. They were silent, but they remembered. To say the least they retained an impression that we were thoughtless and inaccurate, or that we were unreliable and not to be trusted with a secret, or that we were self-seeking, and this impression made them act differently from what they might have done. We lost something which their kindness and goodwill might have procured for us. We have brought evils upon ourselves, and also, besides bringing evil on ourselves, we have turned aside blessings which were coming on us. And this last evil is perhaps a greater one than the former, while certainly it is the more hidden from us. We are conscious of the evils of our position, though we cannot trace back the causes, but we are quite ignorant of the many blessings which were very near us, but have not come upon us. Perhaps if we could see all that has surrounded our path of life, we should be astonished at their multitude. We should be astonished to find how often we have thwarted God's good purposes for us

by our own negligence, bad temper, indolence, forgetfulness of right, or positive wrong doing of some kind, how we have unwittingly punished ourselves.

A great deal in life is hidden now from our eyes. It is part of the present system which God has ordained, a system which is to test men's characters, that we should not see clearly how His justice is working in the world, how it is working in our own life. "Verily," says Isaiah, "Thou art a God that hidest thyself." "He purposely conceals His plans of action and allows them to perplex us as enigmas."^{*}

The working of divine justice in the world now is a hidden working—it will be at the last an open working. But it is not only the working that will be open and manifest, but the grounds on which it works. Now it takes cognizance of things which are secret and hidden from man, but those things will then be revealed and made known. It will deal openly with things that are open. This is a truth which must awe us. It is one which the Bible puts before us constantly, that "God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." And not only that he brings it all into judgment now in His dealings with us during life—in the consequences that flow from every secret thing, consequences in the external circumstances, in the fortunes of our life as we call them, consequences in the changes that come more or less gradually in the heart and mind and character, those gradual changes which are so very secret, but which may be so very terrible in their end; not only is there all this, but the Bible also tells us that in the day of the Lord the secrets of the heart shall be made manifest. Judgment and the grounds of judgment will be made plain before all. Our Lord will not whisper His judgments into the ear of each. He will not even declare the sentence without giving his reasons. All will be made known. Secrets! There is a power in that word to make each think and speak softly, and almost hold his breath. Secrets! Have you ever seen a man surprised into betraying

* For this quotation and the ideas expressed in this part of the Sermon, see Mozley's Parochial Sermons, p. 341, "The Secret Justice of Temporal Providence."

some secret about himself which told against him? What pain and perhaps shame was there! Yet it was but one secret, one out of many, and one out of the many which he had himself hidden away and knew of. But there are other secrets, man does not know all about himself. It is bad enough to think of being compelled to say before others what we do know about ourselves, but what an aggravation to all that is terrible in the disclosures of that day is the thought of the secrets unknown to ourselves, which the records of our life contain.

The secrets of your life, the secrets that you know, could you face them here before God and this congregation? The unknown secrets, what of them? Yet all will be set forth, open and manifest, before God and the great congregation of angels and men at that day.

And there *are* unknown secrets—it is no rhetorical artifice to speak of them. The only man who doubts it is the man who knows nothing about himself, who is one great secret to himself, being utterly blind. Men who have thought at all have always spoken of the difficulty of self-knowledge. So much of our life passes away out of our remembrance. So much that we try to seize in it for examination slips away from our grasp. Who can number, who can remember the actions of a single day? How incessant is the activity of life, that outward activity which others can perceive. But there is for each of us another world of activity than that external world which lies around us; there is another world in the heart of each. "Thoughts and passions, motives and wishes, hopes and fears, lusts and abhorrences, hatreds and affections, intentions and resolutions, of good and of evil, these are the shadowy inhabitants of that inner world. Shrouded in darkness they hustle one another. Now they prompt our outward deeds—now our outward deeds are but the cloak beneath which they disguise themselves, so that men perceive them not. Now they show themselves openly to all, now we ourselves are deceived as to their real character."*

* Bishop of Ely's Sermons—Vol. I., p. 268.—"The Secrets of the Heart."

Who is there : who, as he looks into himself and thinks, does not wonder and fear at that busy world within him ? And we see it not all. The heart is deceitful above all things ; who can know it ? Our own motives and purposes, our own objects, do not always stand out clear before us. But "the eyes of the Lord are in every place," and what He sees now shall one day be stripped of every covering and laid bare before the eyes of all.

My brethren, think of this. Think of it, not as something which a preacher is bound to say in an Advent Sermon, but as something which really lies before *you*, something which *you* must meet.

The very secrets of the heart will be made known and will be judged. Religion is something more than external conduct. Our Lord came into the world, and God the Holy Spirit came to dwell in the Church of Christ on earth for something more than to give men such laws as might repress crime and promote benevolence. Think of the Sermon on the Mount. Think of what our Lord there says about the man who looks on a woman to lust after her. There He tells you the kind of judgment He will pronounce ; the secrets of the heart pass before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

Here then is one practical point to which we come. Do you want an Advent resolution ? Do you want Advent thoughts to leave a mark on your life, and so to prepare you for your Lord's coming ? Resolve then to take heed to your thoughts. Resolve before God, looking to Him for help, and knowing that He will help. He will help you through His Holy Spirit ; it will be help in temptation remember, not freedom from temptation, but it will be help.

Watch your thoughts. Many a one who fears to offend openly, indulges in thought of an offence. For example : there are not a few who have gratified themselves with thoughts how they would like to treat some one who has done them an ill turn as they think. There are not a few who have set themselves up on a pinnacle of greatness or of happiness,

and imagined life and delighted in the thoughts of its pleasures, where pride or idleness or selfishness have all they ask. Indulgence in bad thoughts, especially indulgence in impure thoughts, is a delivering oneself to the power of the enemy. Such thoughts, when indulged in, as it were, saturate the character and weaken it and degrade it. "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

But do not think that we are powerless for good because we know so little of ourselves. Do not be appalled at the thought of secrets working in you, which shall condemn you at the last. The world within us is in God's hand as well as the world around us, and "His mercy is over all His works." Aspirations after good are noted by Him as well as thoughts of evil. He hears the dumb cry of fear from the startled heart, and hears to deliver His own from the fear of the enemy. Times do come in life when we see ourselves anew, and see what we have not seen before, and if such sight be not always and constantly vouchsafed to us, the remembrance of such times teaches us that we have secret sins; that we must cry with the Psalmist, "Who can tell how oft he offendeth. O! cleanse thou me from my secret faults." And we know that of such a cry our Lord's words hold good, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you."

I have dwelt upon the idea of the secret *evil* that is in us, rather than the secret *good*; upon the fear, rather than the comfort that the thought of all secrets being known to God must inspire; and I have done so because we are sinners. And it is the great primary work of God the Holy Ghost to "convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment." He shews us first of all what must be recorded against us that each of us may know what God's mercy in Christ means for him.

And then He comforts us. He tells us that those who feel the bondage of sin and cry to the Saviour are heard. The world knows nothing of the secret sorrows of such, of their repentance, of their bitter self-accusation, of their humble

cry for pardon, of their trembling hope, of their keen desire for better things, of their contest with self, of the secret troubles of their life, of their secret courage and endurance. The world judges them by another standard. It cannot judge them by the things that are covered and hidden from its eyes. But "there are last that shall be first." The secrets of the heart shall be revealed and the grounds of their exaltation will then be seen. It will then be seen how they lived abiding in the Son, and, therefore, why "at His appearing" they "have confidence and are not ashamed before Him at His coming." They confessed Him before men. They were not afraid of saying and doing the right. They were not hypocrites. They served Him in *deed* and in *truth*. And He abode with them and kept them His. Made members of Him in baptism they remained in Him, living members; and the life of the divine nature passed into them in their sacramental union with Him, and the strength, and the confidence, and the courage which man's nature needs when it stands in the light of God's presence was given in this imparting of the divine nature. Their nature now is fitted to endure the glory of that day, and they stand confessed by Christ to be His before the Father and all the holy angels, and all fear passes away in the joy of that honour which is theirs.











